

# CASA FAMILIAR, LIVING ROOMS AT THE BORDER

## SAN YSIDRO, CALIFORNIA ESTUDIO TEDDY CRUZ

TOTAL NUMBER OF UNITS	5-12
SIZE OF AVERAGE UNIT	1,000 SQ FT (BEFORE DIVISION)
NO. DIFFERENT UNIT TYPES	4
COST PER UNIT	\$60 – 70 PER SQ FT



In the historic center of San Ysidro, California, a dense community on the United States-Mexico border, estudio teddy cruz is working with a non-profit housing agency, Casa Familiar, to develop a flexible urban infrastructure accommodating residents' changing needs.

A high density, mixed use, hybrid neighborhood development, the Casa Familiar project is shaped by its location in San Diego, California less than a mile from the border with Tijuana, Mexico. The vast political, cultural, and physical differences existing within such close geographical range influence the design of both the spatial and temporal aspects of the project, reflecting the interweaving and juxtapositions that occur over the border in nearby neighborhoods of Tijuana, as well as naturally occurring community changes that develop over time.

Conceived in multiple stages, the project intrinsically relies on the evolution of community needs, financial opportunities, and autonomous physical growth. The first phase includes the renovation of an historic church into a community center and public garden, and provides offices for Casa Familiar in the attic.

The second phase evolves as a specific physical manifestation of initial landscape gestures made in the public garden. A concrete arbor is built to create open-air rooms, circulation corridors through the site, a provisional market, and supporting services for the community center.

These concrete frames then serve as infrastructure for affordable housing units built in the third phase. Occupied by multi-generational households of extended families, and evolved from a highly user-driven program of neighborhood inhabitation, these housing units are designed to be flexible. Although illegal according to local code, the larger units are designed to facilitate subdivision into smaller units sharing certain amenities, a provisional exercise common to the existing community.

At this scale of individual customization, the project alludes to a larger issue of inflexible zoning laws that govern San Diego. Teddy Cruz describes the ten-foot high steel wall separating San Diego and Tijuana as “a dam, keeping the chaotic growth and spontaneous development of Tijuana's dense and mutating organism from contaminating San Diego's suburban picturesque order.” The Casa Familiar project encourages the appropriation of alleys, setbacks, and driveways for community use spaces that local zoning laws have delineated and then left behind. In reorganizing the standard sequence of construction followed by inhabitation and use, the project hopes to create an explicit architecture for the agency's implicit expression of its philosophy of organic growth. -Marta Falkowska



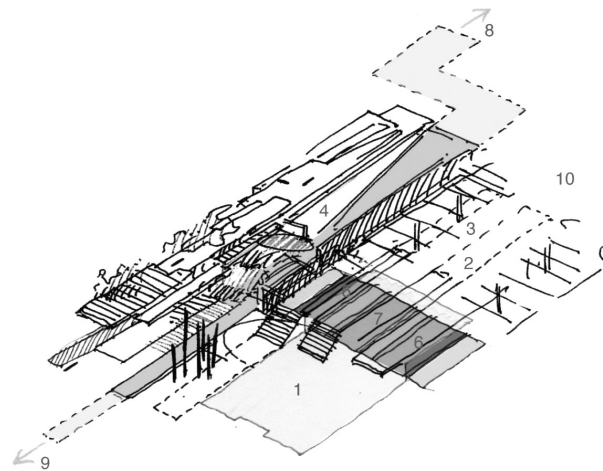
FACING PAGE TOP: Photograph of existing ten-foot high steel wall between San Diego and Tijuana, with conceptual diagram of community integration.

FACING PAGE BOTTOM: Rather than enabling mass customization prior to construction, Cruz designs an open-ended system to be negotiated by the user post-occupancy. The project encourages the appropriation of underused interstitial spaces. Here a public alley is annexed by residents as front yard space.

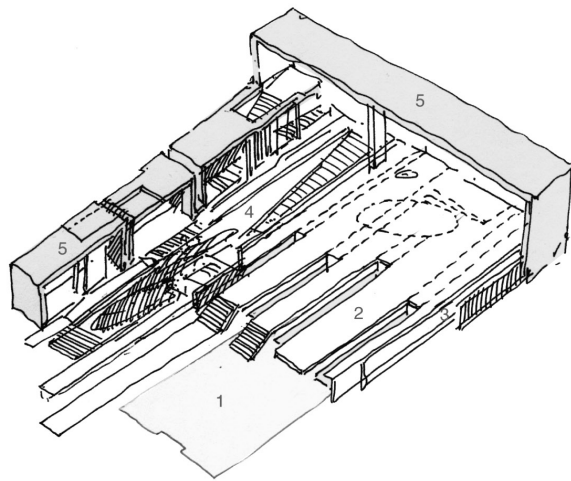
LEFT: Two aerial views show vastly different conditions on each side of the Tijuana-San Diego border. Tijuana's chaotic, dense, and organic method of settlement on the left is a sharp contrast to the typical American suburban sprawl of highly regulated and homogenized housing developments on the right.

BELOW: The top image is a satellite photograph of the current condition, showing Tijuana's close proximity to the border fence and San Diego's retreat, creating a highly patrolled no-man's land. The bottom image is a hypothetical future scenario in which the border has blurred and both cities have become one, sharing infrastructure.

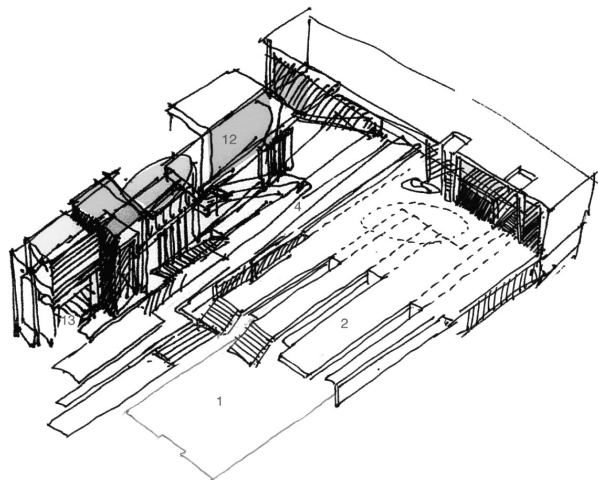




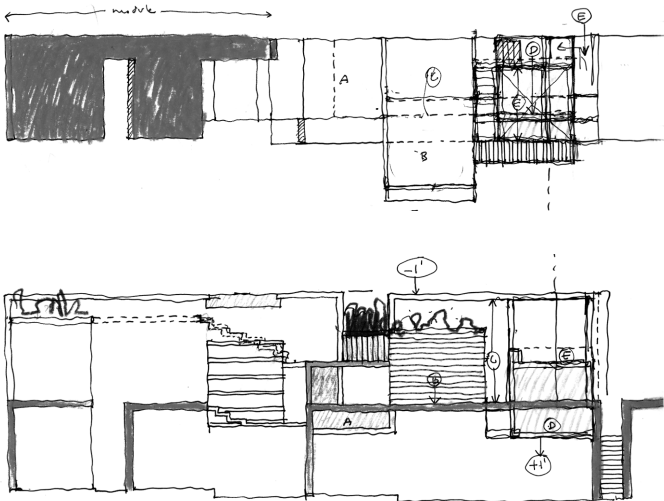
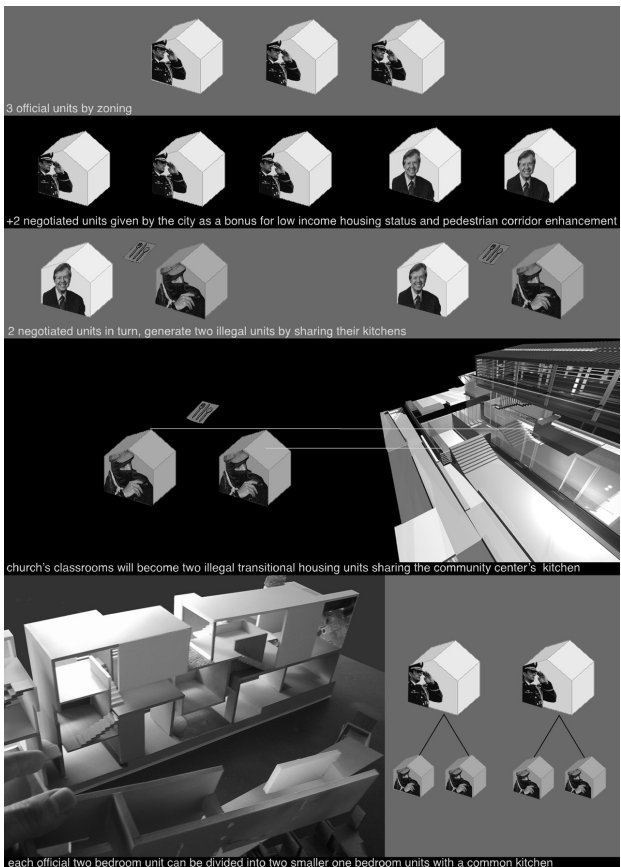
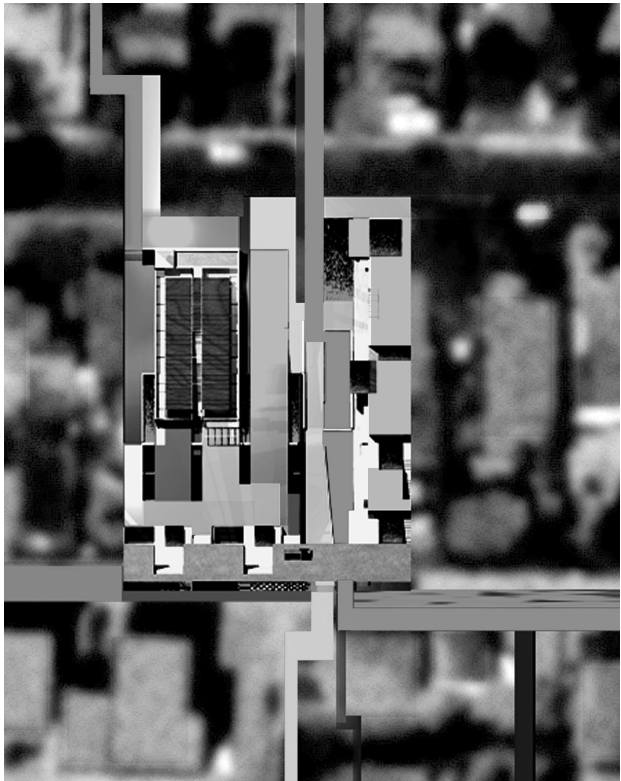
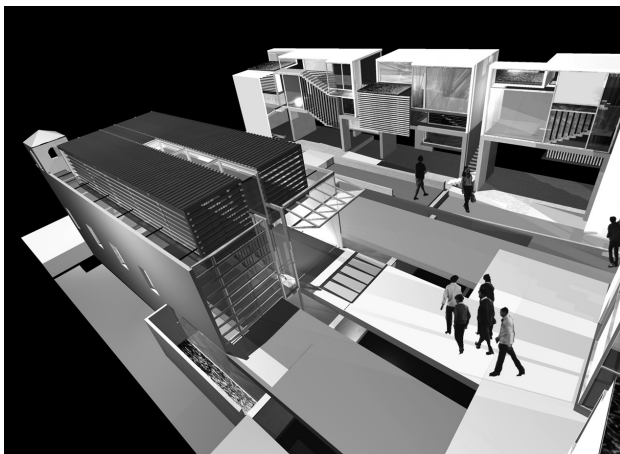
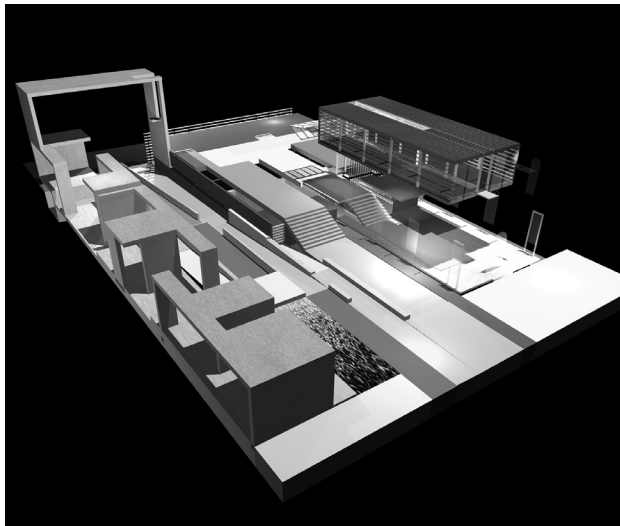
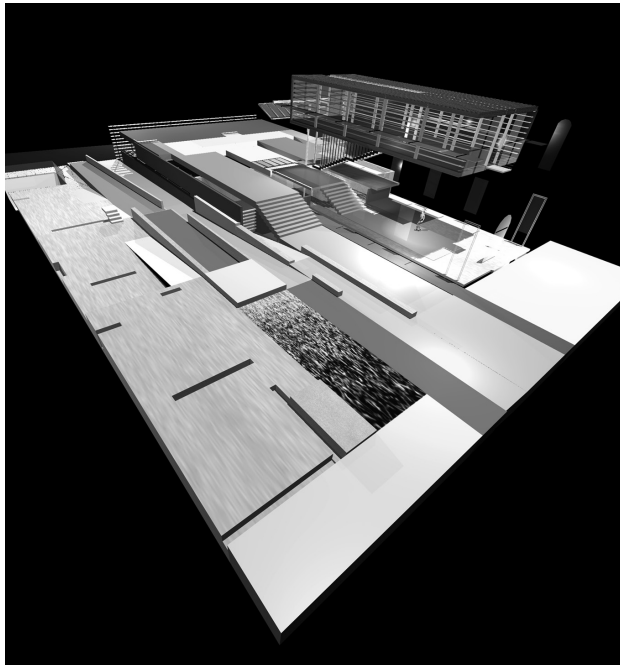
KEY  
LAYER ONE  
1. Existing church  
2. Terrace garden above parking  
3. Parking



LAYER TWO  
4. Garden corridor  
5. Concrete arbor  
6. Church studio units below garden terrace  
7. Community center kitchen



LAYER THREE  
8. Link to existing senior housing and garden  
9. Link to existing park  
10. Alley  
11. Street  
12. Affordable housing  
13. Market



FACING PAGE: The images and corresponding diagrams indicate the project's phasing from top to bottom. Layer one contains the renovation of the church into a community center with Casa Familiar offices in the attic and public garden outside. Layer two includes a public garden with a concrete frame infrastructure that begins to demarcate the site and enables appropriation of the space for markets and open-air pavilions. Layer three shows the weaving of affordable housing units into the concrete frames with maximum possibility of appropriation and subdivision by the inhabitants.

TOP LEFT: Circulation diagram through the site with church renovation to community center on the left and a concrete frame "arbor" on the right.

ABOVE: Sketch section and plan of housing unit and concrete frame organization.

LEFT: Diagram of housing unit planning and possible future subdivision. The imminent division of larger units into smaller apartments with shared amenities is left to the inhabitants and their individual needs.





**PROJECT TEAM**  
estudio teddy cruz: Teddy Cruz, Adriana Cuellar, Kathleen Roe, Alan Rosenblum, Jose Jaime Samper

**CLIENT**  
Casa Familiar, Inc., San Ysidro, California:  
Gustavo Bidart, President of the Board of Directors, Andrea Skorepa, Executive Director, Luz Camacho, Assistant Director

**CONSTRUCTION SYSTEMS**  
Garden Extrusions (market): poured in place concrete. Church renovation: steel and wood framing. Housing: wood framing

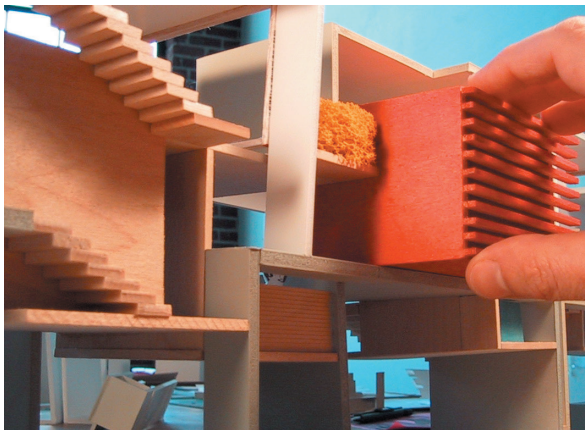
**DESIGN**  
2000-2002

**CONSTRUCTION**  
First layer/phase: 2002  
Second layer/phase: 2003  
Third layer/phase: 2004

**COMPLETION**  
2005

**BUILDING AREA**  
Housing: 6,728 sq ft  
Community Center: 1,800 sq ft  
Casa Familiar offices: 1,500 sq ft  
Community Gardens: 6,300 sq ft  
Market: 2,500 sq ft

**BUDGET**  
The funding for the project is provided by County and City Housing Economic Development and Private Grants; the budget is withheld at client's request.



**FACING PAGE TOP AND ABOVE:** After completion of the final layer, spaces within the concrete frames will be appropriated for private housing units and public services alike. Used to create outdoor corridors, courtyards and instances of unique neighborhood use, the concrete frames are both precursor to the housing project and its effect.

**LEFT:** The concrete frames are designed to be inexpensive and generic, to allow optimal flexibility for the housing units that get inserted. estudio teddy cruz took inspiration from a local developer who acquires San Diego bungalows, slated for demolition and replacement by larger condo developments, drives them across the border to Tijuana and places them atop waiting concrete moment frames. The Casa Familiar project develops further this notion of recycling of resources by creating a simple system of frame and infill that can be readily duplicated in other areas, as well as by designing the frame system to allow, support, and encourage different community uses.

**FACING PAGE BOTTOM:** Sketch and model photo showing development of concrete frames.

